



# Inclusion Explorer

# Shared dialogue makes the difference

This Inclusion Explorer is a practical reflection method that you can use to address morally difficult situations around diversity and inclusion, to create space for openness and foster shared learning. Whether it's something you're going through now or a situation from your past, this structured reflection method helps build mutual understanding and contributes to a safer and more inclusive Amsterdam UMC for everyone.

We're all unique. Differences between people are related to many things – like culture and faith to gender, sexual orientation, upbringing or the environment you live in. Everything that makes you uniquely you – your identity – influences how you feel, how you interpret the world and the way you express yourself.



**Navigating differences isn't always easy. Sometimes they lead to situations that feel uneasy or even unsafe, and it can be difficult to know how to respond, or how to learn from them.** Such experiences may occur in interactions with colleagues or team members, or with patients and their loved ones. Some examples:

- A colleague jokes about my foreign-sounding surname. How can I open a dialogue to express that this is hurtful to me?
- My patient's faith is different from mine. How can I make sure I'm thoughtful and respectful about that?
- I overhear some colleagues gossiping about a patient who has had gender-affirming surgery. I find this inappropriate. What's a good way to have a dialogue on this with my team?
- A patient is treating my colleague in a discriminatory way. How can I respond appropriately and support her?

# Why this Inclusion Explorer?

Do you want to deepen mutual understanding and improve how you navigate diversity and inclusion?

Then it's important to adopt an open mindset toward differences. Exploring and reflecting on your own experiences, background and perspectives helps to improve mutual understanding and address injustice and discrimination. This also strengthens the quality of care and supports an inclusive workplace culture.

You're not on your own. Supporting diversity is a collective responsibility for all Amsterdam UMC staff members. Creating an inclusive culture where everyone feels free to be themselves and feels truly heard requires open and respectful engagement with one another.



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Building mutual understanding and contributing to a safer and more inclusive Amsterdam UMC for everyone.



# Meaningful dialogue on inclusion

Creating space for open and inquisitive dialogue around diversity and inclusion helps people feel acknowledged and understood, promotes shared moral learning and improves how we handle difficult or challenging situations. This in turn leads to more understanding and effective teamwork.

Meaningful dialogue fosters mutual understanding and a sense of support, even in moments of disagreement. It also raises awareness of different perspectives, biases, inequality of opportunity and experiences, allowing you to work on these issues together. Effective teamwork and collaboration depends on listening to all voices and respecting differences. Only then can you truly respond to each person's needs.

## But how do you engage in meaningful dialogue on diversity?

This Inclusion Explorer helps you do just that. The method consists of three steps, each supported by specific questions to guide you through the process effectively. You'll also find practical tips and useful conditions to help foster meaningful dialogue.

A meaningful dialogue isn't about proving a point or convincing others you're right, but about building mutual understanding by exploring each other's perspectives and learning from personal experiences and situations. This helps foster empathy, connection and greater awareness of one another's feelings. You may not always be in agreement, but you can learn to understand each other. And remember: **shared dialogue makes the difference.**



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Effective teamwork and collaboration depends on listening to all voices and respecting differences.

# Conditions for dialogue

Talking about diversity and social inclusion isn't always easy. You might worry about negative consequences or reactions, whether you'll be supported, or you may feel uncertain about your own knowledge. The following conditions can help you take that step with more confidence.

A meaningful dialogue on diversity and inclusion hinges on the attitude and mindset of the participants. Genuine curiosity about each other's experiences is essential. Agreeing on the conditions for dialogue with all participants ensures a respectful and safe environment for open exchange and ensures people feel safe to be themselves. Depth in dialogue arises when individuals are willing to be vulnerable, receptive to feedback and talk about what's important to them. Your background and experiences also add valuable layers to this process. These conditions for dialogue are focused on a constructive mindset and attitude as well as relevant questions to deepen understanding of yourself, others and the situation.

- 1. Pay attention to your feelings
- 2. Start with yourself. Recognise, acknowledge and examine biases
- 3. Show genuine curiosity
- 4. Respect each other and each other's boundaries
- 5. Engage in dialogue, not discussion!
- 6. Support one another
- 7. Encourage open dialogue on power dynamics and relationships
- 8. Foster a shared sense of safety and trust



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A meaningful dialogue on diversity and inclusion hinges on the attitude and mindset of the participants.

## Conditions for dialogue

### 1. Pay attention to your feelings

Differences can give rise to feelings such as discomfort or sadness. These feelings are a normal part of navigating challenging situations. They reveal what's important to us (values) and what we need and care about. Taking time to reflect on your feelings can deepen your understanding of yourself and others, both during a dialogue and in a professional setting. Being open about your emotions and acknowledging when something affects you can be a powerful act. In doing so you invite others to do the same, encouraging openness and deepening bonds between you. For those in leadership roles in particular, this openness sets a valuable example.

Accept that feelings are part of the dialogue. If you sense that emotions are present, either in yourself or in others, during the dialogue, dare to bring that into the open. Ask the other person or persons how they feel. Where does that feeling come from? What does your feeling tell you about what you consider important?



### 2. Start with yourself. Recognise, acknowledge and examine biases

Effectively engaging with diversity starts with self-reflection, honest self-assessment and a willingness to learn. Everyone carries assumptions, prejudices and biases, shaped by our background, experiences and upbringing. These influence how we interact at work – none of us operates in complete neutrality. To engage in meaningful dialogue, it's important to acknowledge that you too carry prejudices and biases, and that they are shaped by your personal history. This reflection deepens your understanding of yourself, which in turn facilitates more connected relationships.

It also requires you to be open to both honest self-assessment and feedback. Ask yourself and each other the following questions: What judgment do I have on this? What is this based on?

## Conditions for dialogue

### 3. Show genuine curiosity

Values and priorities vary from person to person. It's important therefore to avoid generalisations. To truly understand someone's thoughts or feelings you need to ask. Show genuine curiosity. Be patient and listen attentively – a good and open dialogue needs time to unfold. If necessary, schedule a follow-up meeting to continue the dialogue.

Focus on asking each other open questions. Ask yourself: what don't I know yet or what don't I understand? Ask the other person what they consider important, and the reasons why. Also, invite the other person to be inquisitive about you. Meaningful dialogue relies on mutual interest. Consider how you can express yourself in a way that helps the other person truly understand you.



### 4. Respect each other and each other's boundaries

Treat others in a way that reflects how you also wish to be treated. Differences exist, but every person holds equal value. Show respect through the way you communicate, your body language and by asking sincere questions.

When disrespect arises take the opportunity to talk about it. Sometimes, without meaning to, we may hurt someone. It's important to recognise that our intentions don't always match the impact on others. Address this openly, discuss it with each other and, above all, stay open to learning from your own behaviour. Ask each other: Are we treating each other respectfully? If not, what are the causes and what can we do to improve this?

Pay attention also to your own and each other's boundaries. For example, not everyone wants to talk about sexuality with colleagues or healthcare professionals. Recognise and make clear where your boundaries lie. This is important to prevent the dialogue from becoming unsafe. If you're unsure whether to ask something, ask the other person first, or share your hesitation. This allows both of you to set boundaries and decide together what feels okay to talk about.

## Conditions for dialogue

### 5. Engage in dialogue, not discussion!

The objective of a meaningful dialogue on diversity isn't to persuade (discussion), but to deepen mutual understanding – of both yourself and the other person. How you conduct the dialogue is key in this. Be open to each other's perspectives and accept differences. Make an effort to understand each other's point of view and listen with genuine curiosity. Accept that sometimes the dialogue ends with differing opinions or perspectives.

You don't need to agree with each other, as long as you understand and respect each other and each other's viewpoints. Work together to ensure that all voices and viewpoints are heard – just as you do when collaborating professionally. If you notice the dialogue shifting into a discussion, point this out and ask how, together, you can return to a more open dialogue together. Taking a short pause can sometimes help reset the tone.



### 6. Support one another

Support – both giving and receiving – is essential during challenging dialogues on diversity. You need each other. Support can take various forms:

- Stand up for one another. Speak up when you sense that something said in a dialogue may be hurtful or uncomfortable for someone else, or there is micro-aggression. Share what you observed, how it affected you, and check to see if your impression is accurate.
- If you're feeling alone or uncertain about a dialogue, consider preparing it with a trusted colleague or inviting them to join you.
- Colleagues with relevant knowledge and experience, for example with a particular culture or language, may be able to support you in dialogues.
- Offer support yourself. If you notice a colleague who seems isolated or not understood, take the initiative to talk with them. Ask questions like: who can help me in this situation? And who can I help?





## Conditions for dialogue

### 7. Encourage open dialogue on power dynamics and relationships

Power dynamics are everywhere. This applies across society, in the hospital and among groups of people. Power dynamics can arise from hierarchical or dependent relationships, such as those between a manager and an employee. Sometimes they're more subtle. In conversations about diversity, power dynamics can sometimes hinder open dialogue – such as when one person dominates the conversation, leaving little room for others to contribute.

When this happens, say it needs to be addressed, even if it's difficult to do so. Before starting the dialogue, consider asking: what power dynamics might be at play here, and how can we address them together? If needed, bring this up during the dialogue as well. If you're hesitant to speak up or are concerned about potential repercussions, consider bringing in an external facilitator.



### 8. Foster a shared sense of safety and trust

Trust and a sense of psychological safety are essential for meaningful dialogue around diversity. Strive to ensure the dialogue can take place in the safest possible setting. One way to do this is by agreeing on confidentiality in advance, for example. Choosing a nice location and a quiet moment can also help. Invite the participants to review these eight conditions for dialogue beforehand and confirm their agreement. This shared understanding can be revisited during the dialogue, if needed.

Even with preparation, you can't eliminate all potential challenges. If the dialogue begins to feel unsafe – for you or someone else – pause and address it, for example, in case of hurtful or discriminatory comments. At times, it may be helpful to pause the dialogue and take a moment to reflect together on what's happening there and then, especially if the dialogue begins to feel unsafe. Encourage each other to share when you 'sense' something, and pay attention to this together.



# Steps

Any meaningful dialogue on differences relies on an open mindset, genuine curiosity and structure. The Inclusion Explorer helps you reflect together on a specific experience around diversity, inclusion or exclusion.

The method consists of three steps. The first step is to experience the situation. This is followed by how you respond. Finally, it's essential to weigh what is important to everyone and, based on that, to decide what the possible next steps could be.

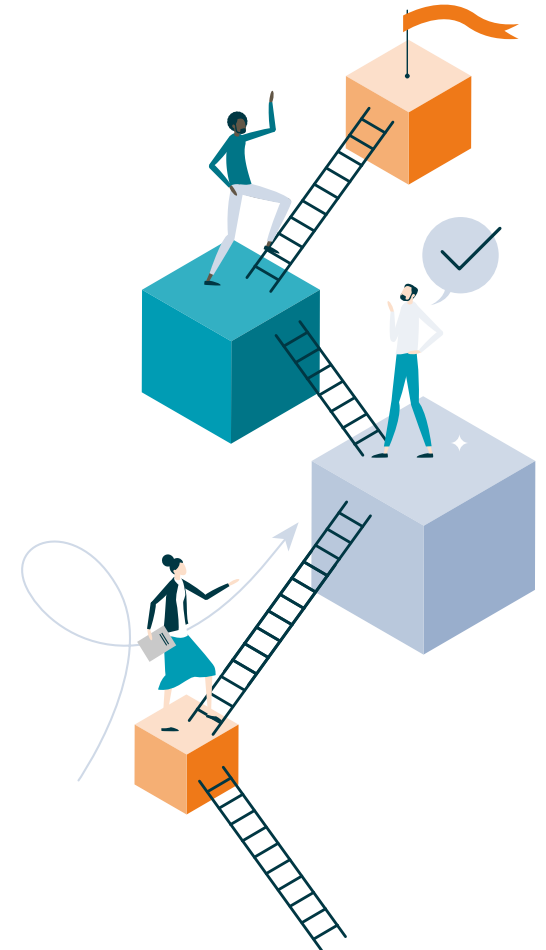
Each element of this reflection method is accompanied by specific guiding questions that help you to structure the dialogue. This method helps you with exploring differences together, fostering mutual understanding and supporting the case presenter in dealing with a morally difficult situation that is related to diversity or inclusion.

By applying these conditions, you facilitate open and respectful dialogue. Make a series of agreements in advance, such as how to ensure a safe setting for dialogue, with everyone taking part. Make sure the dialogue aligns with these conditions.

- **Step 1 - Experience**
- **Step 2 - Respond**
- **Step 3 - Weigh**
- **Reflection**

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## Steps

### Step 1 – Experience

- › **What is the situation?** (Case presenter)
  - Ask factual questions only. (Participants)
- › **What feelings are you experiencing about the situation?** What makes it difficult or challenging for you? (Case presenter)
- › **What is the moral question** you want to explore? (Case presenter)

### Step 2 – Respond

- › **What do all the participants feel?** How do your background and personal history influence your feelings? Begin with a moment of silence (one minute) to reflect on your feelings and write them down. Then, invite each person to share their feelings before beginning the dialogue. (Participants)
  - Also discuss any underlying judgements or biases that influence how you feel. What initial judgements come to mind? Which prejudices and assumptions do you recognise among each other and in yourself? Where do these come from?
- › **What did you think of the participants' responses?** (Case presenter)



## Steps

### Step 3 – Weigh

- › **What do you consider important and, based on that, what steps would you take?** Begin with a moment of silence (one minute) to reflect on your feelings or write them down. Then, invite each person to share their feelings before beginning a group dialogue.  
(Participants)
  - To deepen the dialogue, consider asking: what values are especially relevant to you?
  - Optional: what might be important to other people involved in the situation (if not present)?
- › **What do you personally consider important** and, based on that, what steps will you take? How do your background and history influence you in this regard?  
(Case presenter)
- › **What key takeaways do you see from this dialogue?**  
Participants first, then the case presenter.



### Reflection

**Afterwards, discuss how you experienced the dialogue** from your role and share any feedback you have for future dialogue.

**What was it like for you to be the case presenter?** What was it like for the facilitator and for the participants?



# Practical tips

## Facilitator

Assign a facilitator (not the case presenter) to oversee the structure, time and process. The dialogue is central. This involves creating space for different experiences and viewpoints in a safe environment, jointly reflecting on the situation at hand and openly discussing what's happening in the group (group dynamics), for example, in moments of emotional intensity or when hurtful comments are made. If there is a power imbalance or a concern around safety, you might consider bringing in an external facilitator familiar with the method and independent of the situation.

## Case presenter

Share a personal, concrete situation that has to do with diversity and inclusion to encourage deep reflection on feelings, perspectives and potential actions. This could be something which happened to you recently or some time ago.

## Preparation

Take the conditions for dialogue as a starting point for meaningful dialogue on diversity, and take time to discuss the conditions together in advance of the dialogue. In addition, adopt an enquiring mindset: the aim is not to prove a point

or convince others you're right, but to deepen your mutual understanding alongside your understanding of yourself, to support each other and the case presenter and to learn from personal experiences.

## Time

Set the duration in advance. Pairs typically require less time, while groups of four or more benefit from at least one hour.

## Structuring

The method can be used individually, in pairs or in groups. Keep in mind that group composition influences and shapes the dialogue you have with one another.

If the dialogue involves those directly affected by the situation, the process will differ from dialogue among people who are not personally connected. Both types of dialogue can be valuable.

## Being heard

In group discussions, some voices may be louder than others. To promote equitable participation, implement a moment of silence in steps 2 and 3 and invite each person to speak in turn.

# Evaluation

Your experiences with the Inclusion Explorer matter to us. By filling out the 7-question evaluation form, you help us better understand its impact and identify how we can improve the dialogue method\*. Use the link or scan the QR code to fill out the evaluation.

Thank you for your feedback!



\* all information is treated confidentially. Insights from your responses may be used anonymously for the purpose of scientific research.

## Publication details

This dialogue method was further developed on behalf of the D&I Programme Group for and together with various staff members and experts from Amsterdam UMC under the supervision of Dr. Charlotte Kröger of the Department of Ethics, Law and Medical Humanities.

The Inclusion Explorer is based on a previously developed dialogue method: 'The Diversity Compass'. See also: Kröger, C., Molewijk, B., Muntinga, M., & Metselaar, S. (2024). The Diversity Compass: a clinical ethics support instrument for dialogues on diversity in healthcare organisations. BMC medical ethics, 25(1), 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-023-00992-z>

More information on diversity and inclusion at Amsterdam UMC can be found on the D&I theme page on TulpIntranet. If you have any questions or ideas, please don't hesitate to contact: **[diversiteit@amsterdamumc.nl](mailto:diversiteit@amsterdamumc.nl)**.